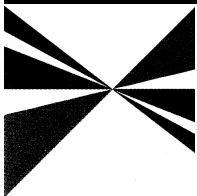


# Livable Places PROFILES

## WHITTIER BOULEVARD *East Los Angeles, CA*



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA  
ASSOCIATION of GOVERNMENTS

1996

*The Whittier Boulevard corridor recovered from rioting in 1969 to eventually see a major revitalization of the area as one of the most vibrant commercial areas in the inner city neighborhoods of the Los Angeles area.*

*Case Study*  
*Total Acres*  
**57**

*East LA*  
*Population*  
**125,000**

*Avg. Minimum*  
*& Maximum*  
*Temperature*  
**57° → 75°**

**Key Features**  
*"El Arco"*

*Mile-Long*  
*Traditional*  
*Commercial*  
*Strip*



### Whittier Boulevard Opens Gateway for Revitalizing East Los Angeles

**W**hittier Boulevard is the main commercial spine of the unincorporated area of East Los Angeles, which is the heart of the Latino community in the Los Angeles region.

A thriving area into the 1950's, Whittier Boulevard has undergone a rebirth since the erection in 1986 of "El Arco," the monumental entry arch that spans the 100-foot wide boulevard. Despite decades of neglect and the economic climate affecting its surrounding low-income community, Whittier Boulevard has few vacancies and continues to be the hub for thousands of shoppers.



▲ *In an area where many residents do not own cars, a good transit system is essential.*



*The palm-lined boulevard is packed with stores.*



*New storefronts bolster the revitalization efforts.*



*The boulevard is a great place for residents of all ages.*



*A local youth helping out with the merchants' campaign that cleans sidewalks and gutters daily.*

## Public / Private Investment

The County of Los Angeles committed \$125,000 annually for five years to the Community Business Revitalization program to market the area, support the merchant's association and spur private investment. Originally designed to create a one-to-one public to private match, the program produced nearly \$5 million in business and storefront improvements.

When Whittier Boulevard was relinquished as a state highway to the County, the state provided \$2.7 million for public improvements. A county supplement brought the total to \$3.4 million for the streetscape improvements, including the monumental arches.

## Special Features and Events

The Latino Walk of Fame was inaugurated in June 1995 to honor outstanding leaders who have made historical and social contributions. Spaces have been created for over 380 plaques. Permanent granite plaques have been put in place for the first 20 honorees.

The merchants' association sponsors a Comprehensive Clean-Up Campaign that cleans the sidewalks and gutters daily and removes litter and trash.

## Future Plans

The completion of the Red Line subway will mean substantial new opportunity for the Whittier Boulevard corridor, opening up opportunities for economic development and improved access to jobs. Two stops are planned for the area, creating the potential for additional transit-oriented development. Efforts are underway to include restoration of the historic Golden Gate Theater as a theater and cultural arts complex as a joint development project with the transit agency.

The community would like to see a specific plan put in place to guide future development of the area.

## Lessons Learned

Urban design works. Making an area safer and more attractive for pedestrians creates loyal customers. A commercial area can also be a center for the community. People can empower themselves through partnership with local government to improve the economic health and quality of life. Nothing comes easily – revitalization takes time.



*The Local Government Commission and the Center for Livable Communities are EPA Transportation Partners.*

*Funding for this series of livable community profiles is provided by the Southern California Association of Governments.*



*An Aztec-inspired mural adorns the side of this building, which was previously a United Artists movie theatre. The inset at the right shows a refurbished "Unity" tableau common to the movie house design.*

## Restoring Vitality

The mile-long stretch of Whittier Boulevard was developed prior to World War II, and prior to zoning requirements for parking. The area thrived in the 1950's but as the area's demographics changed, it began a long decline, with rioting damaging the area in 1969. The Whittier Boulevard Merchants' Association was founded to help rebuild and re-establish the vitality of the district. A revitalization study, completed in 1982, provided the strategy for reinvesting in the area.

The January 1986 dedication of the monumental arch "El Arco" provided the symbol of rebirth. In 1988, the County of Los Angeles adopted an updated plan for the entire unincorporated area of East Los Angeles. Barrio Planners, the firm that conducted the 1982 revitalization study, was retained to design an attractive streetscape program for the boulevard.

Drawing on distinctive Aztec and Spanish motifs, banners, benches, trash receptacles and street and sidewalk paving designs were installed along with Mexican fan palms as street trees. The Commercial Business Revitalization program offered low-interest loans and rebates to merchants to upgrade their storefronts.

## Transportation and Access

The wide boulevard includes two lanes of traffic each way. There are 400 on-street parking spaces and another 1,400 in off-street public and private areas. Whittier Boulevard is a major bus corridor for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. A planned extension of the Red Line subway from downtown Los Angeles will link the boulevard with the regional rail network now under construction. The high population densities in surrounding neighborhoods provide a large number of pedestrian shoppers. There are no facilities to promote bicycle use.



*This street banner picks up on East LA's Hispanic heritage and El Arco's geometrics.*

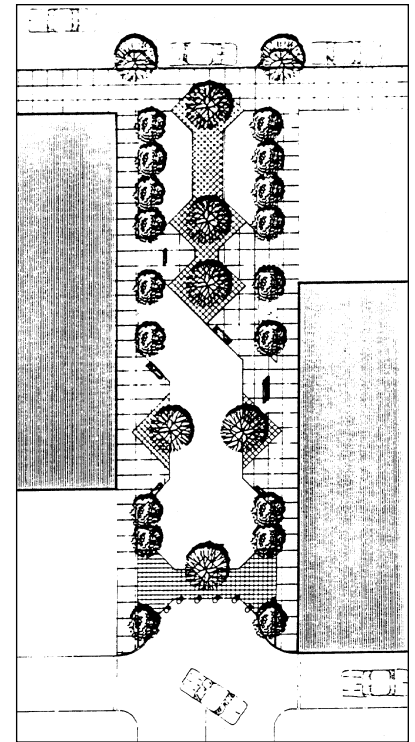
### Whittier Boulevard

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*A drawing of the Whittier/Atlantic station planned as part of the Los Angeles METRO Red Line's eastern extension. (art by Barrio Planners)*



*Closing block to cars creates mini-park.*

## Mix of Uses

Because the area covers such a wide range of needs for the community, there is a very wide range of retail and commercial services. Independent stores, including furniture and clothing stores, are larger-sized than in most communities. There is a supermarket, bank branches, professional services and specialty shops from bakeries to bridal stores. A post office is just off the boulevard.

## Reasons for Success

The historic importance of Whittier Boulevard as a center of the Latino community has become a point of pride and loyalty. Local merchants reinforce that connection by strongly catering to the needs of that community through their merchandising and special events. The tireless efforts of the merchants' association to improve the boulevard and to keep it clean have maintained hope and positive momentum for the area.

Since a high percentage of surrounding residents do not have cars, the proximity of an attractive and convenient shopping area gives it an advantage over newer auto-oriented shopping centers.



*Crowded sidewalks energize Whittier Blvd.*



*El Arco at night, framed by a row of palm trees.*